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Two DOJ-Authored Bills That Protect Vulnerable Delawareans Signed Into Law

Wilmington – A pair of bills drafted by the Attorney General's Office that will help domestic violence survivors rebuild their lives and do more to crack down on sexual predators targeting the disabled and elderly have been signed into law after winning approval from the General Assembly.

“Both of these new laws provide powerful tools to keep some of the most vulnerable Delawareans safer from criminals who would harm them,” Attorney General Beau Biden said. “Whether it’s a domestic violence victim whose security depends on staying hidden from her attacker, or a group home resident whose disability renders him more susceptible to abuse, we’re now providing stronger protection to those who need it the most.” I want to thank the General Assembly for moving quickly to pass these bills and the Governor for signing them into law.”

Senate Bill 28 creates the Delaware Address Confidentiality Program, which allows domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking victims, as well as those in the witness protection program, to apply for a Department of Justice authorized substitute address to use in place of their actual address. Participants will use this substitute address as their address for registration, employment, billing, governmental, and other personal matters. Under the legislation, participants’ street addresses would be disclosed only to law enforcement when it is necessary in an emergency.

“This new law creating an address confidentiality program will allow us to protect people who are facing the most serious danger,” said Senate Majority Leader Patricia Blevins, D-Elsmere, who has long been an ardent advocate for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. “It is too easy today for stalkers and violent abusers to find their victims and further victimize them. In these extreme cases, this program may be what makes the difference between life and death.”

House Bill 63 protects Delawareans in treatment facilities and group homes from sexual assault by making it clear that vulnerable adults cannot consent to sexual crimes being committed against them. The new law increases potential jail time from 8 to 15 years depending on the level of sexual contact involved or when the abuse, mistreatment or neglect results in serious physical injury to the patient.

“This law should reassure the public that we’re serious about going after sexual predators who go after people, who in many cases cannot help themselves,” said Sen. Bethany Hall-Long, D-Middletown, who helped guide the law through the Senate. “As a nurse, I know it’s important for a family’s peace of mind to know that their loved ones are safe from harm as they’re receiving care. This should add some reassurance.”

Rep. Michael A. Barbieri, the lead House sponsor for both measures, said that protecting vulnerable Delawareans is a top priority for government, and these two bills will accomplish that goal.

“Unfortunately, there are people out there who will exploit the vulnerable and harass victims of crime,” said Rep. Barbieri, D-Newark. “We must put protections in place to shelter and protect the elderly, people with disabilities and crime victims from those who would take advantage of them. I am pleased that we were able to quickly and overwhelmingly pass these bills and hope they make a difference in people's lives.”

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